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AUTHOR Johnstone, Tamara S.
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ABSTRACT

An informal national survey of new efforts in foreign language education undertaken by the Joint National Committee for Languages revealed that 12 states had made significant progress, another 13 states showed positive movement, and 12 had concluded studies, reports, and/or recommendations that may yield some results. Six had studies in progress, and eight more had legislation currently under consideration. In eight states, no progress was evident. Among the outstanding efforts were passage of laws establishing rewards for outstanding students, state university entry requirements in a foreign language, school district-adopted performance standards, required elementary school foreign language programs, and new and more stringent teacher certification regulations. Strong foreign language recommendations were found in several of the task force reports. Overall, strong forward movement toward improved foreign language education was found, but a need for national leadership in this area was found as well. (MSE)

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ACTFL - November, 1984

THE STATES RESPOND: RECENT STATE INITIATIVES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

By
Tamara S. Johnstone
Assistant Director, Joint National Committee for Languages

According to the Secretary of Education, 165 state-level task forces have been created to examine education in all fifty states. The majority of these deal with foreign languages and international studies. One national study that was just released last May is A Nation Responds, which attempts to assess how well the states have addressed A Nation At Risk and the other recent reports critical of education in the U.S. A Nation Responds presents a state-by-state profile of educational developments during the past year (May 83-May 84) and a chart summarizing these state initiatives. The report notes that "Forty-eight states are considering new high school graduation requirements, thirty-five have approved changes"; "twenty-one report initiatives to improve textbooks and instructional materials"; twenty-four are examining master teacher or career ladder programs, and six have begun statewide or pilot programs."[1] This report, however, is not geared specifically to foreign language education but rather to all educational developments.

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So, last Summer, JNCL did a quick study of its own basically on the assumption that all of the recent national education reports have prompted activities in the states regarding foreign

languages and international studies. Our study was not terribly scientific -- what we did was contact all of the state supervisors, people in the state education departments, newsletter editors, or just about anybody who could tell us what was happening in their state. The result was that we do basically have information from all fifty states.

It's our understanding that a much more thorough study with a good data base is currently being done by the National Council on Foreign Languages and International Studies together with the Council of Chief State School Officers. So, we are very much looking forward to seeing that when it's done. At this point, however, we are keeping our own study current by adding and deleting information from our computer as we get it. Consequently, the most significant part of my report is a plea that any of you that have any recent information on what's going on in your state, please share it with us. Incidentally, our report was published in the september 1984 Northeast Conference Newsletter -- it's Newsletter #16, for those who are interested.

At this point, let me very briefly summarize what we did find. We found that twelve states have made what must be considered significant progress. In addition to the states that our colleagues here are representing, these are Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, Vermont, and D.C. Another thirteen states have elements of positive movement (Arkansas, California, Idaho, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Missouri, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, and South Dakota)

and twelve states have concluded studies, reports, and/or recommendations that may yield some results (Alaska, Arizona, Iowa, Maine, Michigan, Nebraska, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Washington).

We identified six with studies in progress (Colorado, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Utah, West Virginia) and eight more with legislation currently under consideration (Delaware, South Carolina, Oklahoma, Wisconsin, Maryland, Maine, Kansas, California).

Finally, there were only eight states where we could not identify some progress or movement. This may not be negative. This may be simply because we could not identify movement in these states. These states are Connecticut, Hawaii, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Tennessee, and Wyoming.

I'd like to mention some of the things that are going on in the states that we identified as having significant progress (besides those states represented here). In Florida, the state legislature in 1983, enacted several laws pertaining to foreign language study -- including rewards for outstanding high school graduates who complete an advanced program of prescribed studies, which includes four years of a foreign language. Also, beginning in August 1987, Florida residents must have two foreign language credits in order to be admitted to state universities in Florida. Furthermore, each district school board must adopt student performance standards for academic programs, including foreign languages in grades 9 through 12.

In Louisiana, an elementary foreign language program for

30 minutes every day shall be required for all academically able students, beginning in grade 4 in the 1985-86 school year and extending to grade 6 by the 1987-88 school year. Also, a foreign language program of at least 150 minutes per week of language arts time shall be required for all academically able students beginning with grade 7 in the 1987-88 school year and extending to grade 8 by the 1988-89 school year.

Lastly, another state I'd like to mention is Vermont, where new teacher certification regulations have been passed into law. The regulations for foreign language teachers include such things as the ability to communicate with a native speaker of that language with a command of vocabulary and syntax sufficient to express thoughts in conversation at normal speed and with good pronunciation, the ability to read with immediate comprehension prose and verse of average difficulty, and an understanding of languages as an essential element of culture.

Now, as I mentioned, a number of states have had some very strong task force reports that are likely to produce some legislation. At this point, I would like to mention and quote from two or three of these.

The Oregon Governor's Commission on Foreign Languages and International Studies recommended that elementary schools provide an introduction to foreign language study before grade eight and that secondary schools encourage students to take part in a wide variety of international instruction. Foreign language study, they say, should be studies for a minimum of two years,

but students should be urged to study four years to acquire general oral and written competence. Furthermore, colleges and universities should require a minimum of two years study of foreign language for admission, and at least one full-time course for graduation. Also, all teacher candidates should complete at least two years of foreign language study and a one-year course dealing with international subject matter. Finally, international exchange programs should be encouraged at all levels for both students and faculty.

The Ohio Foreign Language Task Force recommends the creation of a permanent advisory council on foreign languages and international studies to keep track of career opportunities in Ohio, to develop public awareness in the legislature and among citizens of the value of foreign language and international studies, and to assist in improving programs and increasing enrollments. They also recommend upgrading the teacher certification requirements for foreign language and international studies teachers.

Finally, in North Carolina, the Foreign Language Curriculum Study Committee made a number of strong recommendations. They recommend -- and this is really one of my favorites -- that "every student study a second language everyday for thirteen years."[2] Some of their other recommendations are that in grades 7 through 12, foreign language classes should be limited to twenty students and should not exceed fifteen students at the elementary level; and they recommend "the preparation of public service announcements for local media and the promotion of a

'year of foreign languages' in order to increase public awareness of the importance of second language study."[3]

In conclusion, it appears that the situation at this point in time is quite positive and fluid. There certainly is a great deal of activity at the state level, and as you will hear, some of that activity is very impressive. A note of caution, however, is that while states like California, New York, Virginia, Illinois, and Texas, because of strong leadership, vision and legitimate concern about the world we live in, are addressing language and global education, from the perspective of JNCL, we would stress the need for national leadership and support as well. Activities by the states, no matter how forward-looking and progressive, do not excuse the national government from its responsibilities in this area.

ENDNOTES

[1] The Nation Responds, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 1984), p. 16.

[2] Curriculum Study: Foreign Languages, (North Carolina: Department of Public Instruction, 1983), p. 18.

[3] Ibid, p. 37.

APPENDIX

The Joint National Committee for Languages would like to thank the following individuals for providing information on the specific states discussed here. For other states, your best informational source will be the State Foreign Language Supervisors. The names and addresses of the State Foreign Language Supervisors are listed each December in Annals, a publication of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages.

FLORDIA

Gabriel M. Valdes
Foreign Language Consultant
Department of Education
Tallahassee, Florida 32301

LOUISIANA

David G. Beste
Education Specialist
Foreign Languages and Bilingual Education
Department of Education
P.O. Box 44064
Baton Rouge, LA 70804

VERMONT

Diane Fagin Adler
Foreign Language Consultant
Department of Education
Montpelier, VT 05602-2703

OREGON

David Arlington
Curriculum Specialist
Languages and Social Studies
Oregon Department of Education
700 Pringle Parkway, S.E.
Salem, Oregon 97310

OHIO

Reid Baker
Foreign Language Consultant
Department of Education
65 South Front Street
Room 1005
Columbus, Ohio 43210

NORTH CAROLINA

Gerard Touissant, Foreign Language Supervisor and Frances S. Hoch, Foreign Language Consultant, State Dept. of Public Instruction, Division of Communication Skills, Education Building #215, Raleigh, North Carolina 27611